

ALASKA TRAUMA REGISTRY CALENDAR

State of Alaska
Department of Health and Social Services
Division of Public Health
Community Health and Emergency Medical Services

AUGUST 2001

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 AK Safe Kids Teleconference	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13 TBI Meeting in Wash. DC	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29 ISAPP Meeting	30 ISAPP Meeting	31	

Acronyms: TBI=Traumatic Brain Injury; ISAPP=Injury Surveillance and Prevention Program

Alaskan Children and Bicycle Safety

In the years 1994-1998, 82 Alaskan children and teens suffered a bicycle-related head injury serious enough to require hospitalization according to the Alaska Trauma Registry. In two of the cases, the injuries were fatal. Of the 62 cases where helmet use was documented, only 8 of the injured children were wearing helmets, and neither of the fatally injured youth was wearing a helmet. Bicycle helmets have been shown to reduce the risk of head injury by as much as 85%.

National figures from the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) show that the number of bicycle-related head injuries is increasing, even though about half of all bicycle riders wear helmets today, compared with fewer than 18% a decade ago. But, wearing a helmet does not necessarily prevent bicycle-related injuries from happening. Specialists argue that helmet use may give some riders an inflated sense of safety, thus leading to more risk-taking behaviors and more injuries. Dr. Richard A. Schieber at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said that, "public health officials are realizing that in addition to promoting helmet use, safety officials must teach good riding skills, promote good driving practices, and create safer places for people to ride."

The Alaska Injury Prevention Center conducted a study of bicycle helmet use from May-September, 2000 in 11 different Alaska communities. This study showed that less than one-third of 6,615 bicycle riders were wearing a helmet at the time they were observed. The lowest usage rates were found in rural Alaska with Bethel, Dillingham, and Kodiak having 11%, 14%, and 17% respectively. The highest helmet use rates were in Kenai/Soldotna (38%), Anchorage (37%), and Juneau (27%). There were certain locations within communities that had higher helmet usage patterns, such as the Glenn Highway bike trail in Anchorage with a helmet usage rate of 71%, while low socioeconomic neighborhoods only a few miles away had rates of 8-9%.

About two-thirds of the observed bicycle riders were male and about one-third were female, but females wore their helmets 39% of the time compared to males at 28%. The age group breakdown showed that adults were observed wearing helmets 38% of the time, teens 16%, and younger children 34% of the time. Sitka had the highest child usage rate at 74%.

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Health Planner